



# Sensitivity to Casualties in the Battlefield: The Case of Israel

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Asian Journal of Comparative Politics

2018, Vol. 3(1) 46–60

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DOI: 10.1177/2057891117725209

journals.sagepub.com/home/acp



## Abstract

This study examines how long the Israeli people support the government for an ongoing war. The rally-round-the-flag phenomenon, proclaiming that wartime governments can enjoy majority public support at the beginning of wars, is a challenging topic in the field of International Relations. Although this effect was noticed at the time of the Second Lebanon War, it remains unclear which particular condition determined the duration of public support in Israel. While the rally effect is a universal phenomenon, it is important to keep in mind the particularity of Israel. We hold on to an alternative theory, bandwagon effect, emphasizing the role of affectivity of individuals on the flow of information in crisis, in place of the standard rational expectation theory. An original experimental survey was conducted to examine the bandwagon effect in the rally phenomenon among Israeli citizens.

## Keywords

rally effect, experimental survey, Arab-Israel conflict, bandwagon effect

The State of Israel has fought a series of wars since the last millennium. The second Lebanon War and the Gaza War count as major conflicts in the last decade for Israeli citizens. In this era, a democratic state—the US being an exception—rarely engages in international conflicts without cases of international intervention. A representative democracy is assumed to be built upon the principle of public opinion underpinning public policy. Foreign and defense policies are generally not regarded as exceptions to this principle. When looking at the role of public opinion in foreign and military affairs, we can find a considerable amount of research on the relationship between American public opinion and US foreign policy (Everts and Isernia, 2001: 4). Researchers looking into the issue of public opinion shaping foreign policy, therefore, begin their academic investigation in the context of the US.

This study examines the duration of support for the government by the Israeli people in times of war. The rally-round-the-flag effect, or rally effect for short, proclaiming that wartime governments enjoy majority public support at the start of wars, is a challenging topic in the field of

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International Relations (IR) (Colaresi, 2007). Although this effect was noticed at the time of the Second Lebanon War (Elran, 2007), it remains unclear which particular condition determined the duration of public support in Israel. While the rally effect is a universal phenomenon, it is important to keep in mind the particularity of Israel:

Most (but not all) analyses of Israeli public opinion in this regard point to a highly opinionated citizenry with a similar structure at the grassroots level. The high level of political interest should not come as a surprise to those familiar with the context. Israel is a young society that has been engaged from its very inception in 1948 in a continuous struggle to ensure its existence in, and acceptance by, a politically hostile environment. Consequently, its ordinary citizens have developed a strong and ongoing interest in the conduct of the state's foreign policy, particularly as it affects relations with its Arab neighbors. (Hermann and Yuchtman-Yaar, 2002: 597–598)

There are three reasons for addressing the case of Israel in this study. The first reason is the wider perspective of the theory of public opinion in war, based on the evidence of the US case (Baker and Oneal, 2001; Burk, 1999; Hayes and Guardino, 2011; Schwarz, 1994; Gartner and Segura, 2000; Verba et al., 1967). This theory should explain the level of public support in Israel if the rally phenomenon was universal. Second, Israel is not only the Zionist State, or the state for Jews, but also a state endorsing the democratic principle that public opinion underpins public policy. Defense is not the absolute agendum for the citizens but is rather a political issue based on a cost-benefit calculation, or a cost minimization problem under Israeli budgetary constraints. Third, focusing our investigation on Israel will lend further insight into the theory of the rally effect. Social psychologists provide the foundation for the rally effect based on the concept of social identity (Coser, 1956; Frieden et al., 2013: 137). According to Shamir and Shikaki (2002: 541), the social identity theory shows, in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, how “group-mediated bias works to support group members’ needs to derive positive and distinct in-group identity and to maintain group status and integrity.” Maoz and McCauley (2009: 537) obtain empirical results from a survey indicating that Israeli Jews perceived zero-sum relations with and were in fear of the outgroup, the Palestinians, under intergroup threat in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

When our research derives a hypothesis from the theory on the duration of the rally effect, we have to pay attention to the fact that Israel fights to defend the country and has a purpose different from that of the US. The social identity approach gives an intuitive understanding that Israeli citizens might be less sensitive to the numbers of casualties—a factor in the decreasing approval rates for the government—than the American people because of the difference in aims between self-defense and intervention in a foreign country. The citizens are expected to be more sensitive to national security than other nations because of the small size of their country surrounded by hostile Arab states. Furthermore, the average education level is higher for Israelis than for Americans (OECD, 2016). We expect that the Israeli public are rational enough to make a decision that supports or opposes the government in responding to information. The popular aphorisms “the whole world is against us” or “nation that dwells alone” might express the Jewish feeling of being encircled by enemies (Hermann, 2001: 166). Education on the history of the Zionist principle and the system of universal conscription can strongly compel citizens to internalize Jewish identity (Arian, 2005; Furman, 1999; Levy and Sasson-Levy, 2008; Popper, 1998; Sand, 2010). It also underpins the intuition for keeping the duration of the rally effect in Israel. However, we are uncertain as to whether this intuition is true before an examination of the data.

Yagil Levy, an Israeli political scientist, addresses the issue of casualty sensitivity in Israel. Levy (2011) states that, “the legitimation of military sacrifice has declined since the 1980s, mainly following the First Lebanon War”<sup>1</sup> in 1982. The most recent government, Levy (2010) has said, faced the tradeoff between casualty aversion—using excessive force with avoiding the risk of casualties—and avoiding non-combatant fatalities; it accepted the former strategy in Israel. Casualty aversion, shyness, tolerance, or sensitivity are common expressions about how casualties affect public support (Gelpi et al., 2009: 8), and they generally play a key role in posing legal and moral constraints and, thereby, tying the hands of democratic governments in using military force (Levy, 2011: 78–79). Furthermore, Levy (2012) extends his argument to shape the death hierarchy structure in Israeli society; citizens are more sensitive to the death of reservists or secular middle-class conscripts and less so to that of residents in peripheral areas near the border with the Gaza Strip, e.g. Sderot city. Though we are interested in the arguments for the democratic face of Israel, Levy’s arguments depend on the documents of the Winograd Committee, the inquiry commission into the Second Lebanon War, or secondary research materials about Israeli wars, so there is no strong evidence in his research in this respect.

In the remainder of the article, I first lay out the theories of the rally effect and the human costs thereof. Secondly, I delineate the rational expectation, assuming highly educated citizens, as the mainstream foundation for explaining public attitudes, along with the bandwagon effect theory as the alternative approach. I emphasize the advantage of the bandwagon theory to explain the duration of the rally-round-the-flag mindset in Israel. Thirdly, I test my central hypothesis about poll information affecting the attitudes toward the government in wartime. I examine the importance of the bandwagon effect by analyzing the consistency of the data from our experimental survey. I conclude by discussing the external validity and implications of our findings.

## Theory

### *The rally effect and human cost*

Most scholars of international politics would point to Mueller (1973) for his seminal work on public opinions surrounding war (Baum and Groeling, 2010; Berinsky, 2009; Berinsky and Druckman, 2007; Brody, 1991; Gartner and Segura, 1998; Gelpi et al., 2006, 2009). The rally-round-the-flag effect denotes the phenomenon of increasing popular support by citizens for their country’s government when the country is involved in an international crisis or war. It comes from the first systematic explanation by Mueller in his study of public opinion on the Korean War and Vietnam War. The rally effect fosters the interest of political scientists, including those who study democracies facing the possibility of war. The main explanation for the rally effect put forward in the literature is that an international conflict causes an upsurge in patriotism and nationalistic emotion, determining public support for using military force in a democracy. One of Mueller’s important findings is that the presidential approval rate decreases in wartime proportionate to the increase in numbers of casualties. This phenomenon has been observed repeatedly, not only in the US but also in the UK, as well as in the State of Israel (Ben-Meir, 2007; Everts and Isernia, 2001; Lai and Reiter, 2005).

The scholarly debate on the rally effect and casualties revolves around the question of how increasing death tolls from a military operation influence the levels of support for the government at war. One view holds that in most circumstances casualty-phobia makes the government lose support due to public reaction to the number of casualties (Mueller, 1971, 1973). Mueller found

that, like a logarithmic response, smaller numbers of casualties mean a larger drop in presidential approval just after the start of a war, in comparison with casualties caused later in the conflict. The logarithmic response theme is criticized in Brody (1991: 88–90) by using a data fitting calculation of a quadratic model, where three of the 13 cases lost statistical significance. Mueller's study of public opinion on the Gulf War revises his finding to suggest that citizens are sensitive not simply to absolute levels of casualties but to the human cost in the strategic context—i.e. whether in the context of success or failure (Mueller, 1994: 124–129).

The theory of reflexive casualty-phobia, based on the findings of Mueller, was challenged by an alternative view from several academic studies on the Cold War. This alternative view holds that a rational public responds to a leader's actions in international events and performs a cost-benefit calculation of success and failure in a military operation. We can easily identify the contrasting pattern of public support from the US casualties in each war and military operation (Larson, 1996: 9). For example, the Roosevelt government maintained a high support rate, about 80 percent, during the Second World War in spite of over 400,000 casualties. The Clinton government lost about 30 percentage points in public support in October 1993 after the death of 10 soldiers in the Battle of Mogadishu. Larson argues that public tolerance of casualties depends on people making a cost-benefit calculation about war, because the rational assumption fits the data from the surveys from the Second World War to the Battle of Mogadishu. The alternative view, the rational expectation theory of casualties and wartime support, gains the acceptance of the academic majority now (Gartner, 2008: 95; Gelpi et al., 2009: 9; Sullivan, 2008: 123): "The conceptualization of public support as a cost-benefit calculation, including judgments about the expected or actual success of the military intervention, has become a common theme in subsequent scholarship" (Eichenberg, 2005: 148).

### *Theories on rational expectations in the public*

Christopher Gelpi and his collaborators conducted analyses of some aggregate and survey data and their findings support the rational expectations theory. One of their findings is that individuals structure their attitudes toward paying the human cost according to their capability to perform a cost-benefit calculation when facing difficult trade-off situations. Rational expectations theory<sup>2</sup> assumes that people employ their advanced cognitive faculties to assess the legitimacy of military operations: whether force is used in accordance with humanitarianism or with *realpolitik*—a security oriented mission; and whether any military policy objectives are based on a belief about a war's likely success. "Many factors . . . affect the robustness of support. But the public's expectation of whether the mission will be successful trumps other considerations" (Gelpi et al., 2009: 2).

Rational expectations theory contains the assumption that the people oppose their government going to war if the estimated loss exceeds the estimated benefits (Gartner, 2008; Larson, 1996, 2000).<sup>3</sup> This is similar to the assumption in microeconomics on the micro-foundations of mass behavior. Scholars are interested in the trade-off between security and liberty in a democratic society, and have focused on the question of people's tolerance for casualties (Eichenberg, 2005; Feaver and Gelpi, 2004; Gartner, 2008; Gelpi et al., 2006, 2009; Jentleson, 1992; Jentleson and Britton, 1998; Larson, 1996; Sullivan, 2008). This has been approached rigorously by applying experimental survey methods to obtain new findings and/or to confirm previous ones (Gartner, 2008; Gelpi et al., 2009).

Some empirical studies on the cost-benefit model admit the bounded rationality of individuals. Elite cue theory suggests that individuals rely on information from the political elite. It assumes

that the masses are able to collect the required information to come to a judgment regarding international security, but that they instead employ the political messages from the elite so as to reduce the cost of collecting information. The prominent elite provides the reference point to the people to decide whether or not to support the government in wartime (Berinsky, 2009: 69). The concept of cueing messages was defined as a “type of message carried in elite discourse . . . about the ideological or partisan implication” (Zaller, 1992: 42). The findings of Kull and Ramsay (2001) support this theory—US citizens are aware of the seriousness of a military operation from the news of increasing casualties, and therefore do not respond reflexively to the fatalities. Berinsky (2007) obtained his empirical results from his experimental survey data (the Iraq War Casualty Survey) to reinforce the relevance of elite cue theory.

### *The bandwagon effect: An alternative theory*

We would question the assumption on which rests the theory of rational expectations, namely that the people employ a cost-benefit calculation for complicated foreign affairs, even though the theory permits the incomplete capability and the bounded rationality of the public. We hold on to an alternative theory emphasizing the role of affectivity in individuals in the flow of information in times of crisis. The bandwagon effect, a phenomenon describing collective action, is defined as “a situation where the information about majority opinion itself causes some people to adopt the majority view for whatever reason” (Marsh, 1985: 51). It is well known that the bandwagon effect has often been found in voting. The classics of election and communication studies have observed this effect<sup>4</sup> (Campbell et al., 1960: 112; Lazarsfeld et al., 1968: 107–109), and many have tested the theory on opinion formation. Rational voting theory attributes the bandwagon effect to people wanting to avoid wasting their vote. However, one cannot expect studies on war and public opinion to be based on such rationality because there is no such cost to expressing one’s opinion in these circumstances.

A number of affective theories underlie explanations for the bandwagon effect (Hardmeier, 2008). Crowd psychology explains it as an emotional contagion to join the majority. The uses and gratification approach describes an affective reaction to produce a good feeling in standing by the majority. Cue taking theory claims poll results provide a reference point to some people to decide whether to support or oppose the government in wartime—this theory is similar to elite cue theory but it assumes individuals to be reactive to cues from the polls rather than to those from the prominent elite. Affective theories are linked to patriotism in times of war; wartime press reports avoid criticism of the government and instead try to hold the nation together, which increases the bandwagon effect.

Another theoretical approach, without the affective assumption, demonstrates that responses to poll results may stimulate a process of self-persuasion. The cognitive response model that Mutz (1997) constructed suggests that citizens may mentally rehearse possible reasons to explain their own opinions when they get information about those of the masses. The assumption of information processing in the model is not an affective but a highly structured cognitive mechanism. From the approach of the cognitive response model, momentum—surges and declines of public support—is a result of cognitive information processing. This model, therefore, identifies the bandwagon effect on the momentum of mass cognitive response to cues from public opinion polls during wartime.

Bandwagon effects could theoretically be based on prospect theory in the context of IR. Prospect theory is a general model of human decision making to explain behavioral deviation from the predictions of rational expectations. In the context of international crises, political leaders

often choose a risky military option deviating from rational calculation of strategic conditions and political situations. The prospect approach gives a psychological explanation for such behavior from the viewpoint of the leader's dependence on their own reference point. In a territorial dispute, the status quo seems to be the reference point for political leaders. Prospect theory expects that the loss averse tendency is stronger than the risk acceptance tendency among politicians; they therefore prefer military risk for defense of territorial integrity. However, as both Levy (1996) and Welch (2005) state, the prospect approach contains the absence of any mechanism for determinants of reference points; bandwagon theory might be a link to this absence.

The behavior of ordinary people is described in the same way as that of politicians from the prospect theory perspective. To explain citizen support for a government in wartime, some researchers, like Perla (2011), use the prospect approach. If the media sets up a frame to treat a news topic, it is supposed that the frame establishes the reference point on the topic. The degree of public support for the government would become the reference point on the logic of bandwagon theory, when the media frame focuses on the numbers of casualties as the cost of war. Since news media is usually the primary public source of information on war, mass attitudes depend on press as the reference point. Bandwagon theory redeems the deficit of prospect theory.

Poll information, according to bandwagon theory, provides the impetus for an individual's likelihood of supporting the government in war. This suggests the following hypothesis about how trends in polls affect individual wartime support despite increasing numbers of casualties.

**Hypothesis:** Information on high government support rates has a positive effect on individuals' support of the government.

Bandwagon theory is based on the findings of the literature on American public opinion during wars. If we could underpin the bandwagon effect in the context of Israeli politics, the theory would have a broader range of application in democracies. I next show the experimental design used to examine the argument.

## Experimental design

The hypothesis was tested by conducting an experimental survey. The sample was adult residents aged 18 and above, male and female Jewish people, residing in the state of Israel; the sample size is 600. Data were collected by means of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), and the survey was conducted from January 17 to February 4, 2016. To improve the wording of the survey questionnaire prepared by the author, we cooperated with Dr Rafi Ventura of the Guttman Center at the Israel Democracy Institute, and Professor Camil Fuchs of the Department of Statistics at Tel Aviv University. We considered the possible confounding effect of various contexts, and thus prepared two situations which were military operations against Hamas and military operations against Hiz-bullah, with three plausible scenarios, to measure the effect of different information on public approval for the government. The respondents were randomly assigned to three groups for the scenarios, using the split sample technique. Two of the three groups were the treatment groups, who were given information on approval rates. The first group was given information that the *government support rate was still high* despite increasing casualties during the two weeks since the start of the war. The second were given information that the *government support rate had fallen sharply* because of increasing casualties. The third was the control group with no information on support rates.

First situation:

**Table 1.** The effect of poll information in the war against Hamas.

	Hamas		No information
	Support rate Still high	Support rate Falling sharply	
Strongly support	83 45.9%	59 32.3%	66 39.3%
Moderately support	61 33.5%	41 22.7%	41 24.7%
Do not support	23 12.5%	39 21.7%	29 17.2%
Never support	15 8.1%	42 23.3%	31 18.8%
Total	181	181	168

Imagine the following situation. Israel is conducting an operation against *Hamas in the Gaza Strip*. Suppose that at the beginning of the operation there is great public support for both the administration and the operation itself, and assume that the public supports the action.

Now, let's assume that two weeks from the beginning of the operation there have occurred, God forbid, many casualties . . .

Second situation:

Now imagine the same scenario as before but this time it comes in the operation against *Hizbullah in Lebanon*. Again, let's assume that at the beginning of the operation there is great public support for both the administration and the operation itself, and assume that the public supports the action.

Now, let's assume that two weeks from the beginning of the operation there have occurred, God forbid, many casualties . . .

Scenario 1: Suppose that, despite the casualties, the government *support rate is still high*.

[Treatment Group A: same public approval rate]

Scenario 2: Suppose that, because of the casualties, the government *support rate falls sharply*.

[Treatment Group B: falling public approval rate]

Scenario 3: [Control Group: there is no information about support rates]

We prepared the two situations and the three scenarios, the 2×3 experimental design strategy, for the questionnaire to get three different groups for measuring the effect of poll information on public support. This design strategy allows us to identify which treatment group's responses are similar to the responses of the control group. If Group B's responses were similar to that of the control group, i.e. we can recognize no difference between "falling public approval rate" and "no information about support rates," public support is expected to decrease when Israeli citizens respond to sensitive information on death tolls from the mass media. If Group A's responses were similar to that of the control group, i.e. we can attract attention to "same public approval rate," the government would be expected to enjoy the rally effect when respondents decide to stand firmly

**Table 2.** The effect of poll information in the war against Hizbullah.

	Hizbullah		
	Support rate Still high	Support rate Falling sharply	No information
Strongly support	84 46.6%	55 31.6%	62 37.8%
Moderately support	64 35.5%	42 24.0%	47 28.5%
Do not support	22 11.9%	40 22.9%	21 12.6%
Never support	11 6.0%	38 21.6%	35 21.1%
Total	180	175	165

for the war despite getting information on increasing casualties. Here, we can validate the bandwagon effect in the Israeli context.

### Analysis

The levels of support for the government in the three scenarios are shown for using force against Hamas in Table 1 and for using force against Hizbullah in Table 2. We allocate support based on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being “Never support,” 2 “Do not support,” 3 “Moderately support,” and 4 “Strongly support.” As Table 1 indicates, information on public approval influences the levels of support for the government. Israeli citizens appear to tolerate increasing casualties when they know the government is strongly supported in an ongoing military operation. We expect citizens to be intolerant of casualties when they have information on decreasing public approval in the war against Hamas. Table 1 shows that the responses with no information may be similar to those with information on sharply decreasing approval rates. The results of our experimental survey indicate that the information on highly maintaining public approval rates keeps the level of public support for the government in comparison to the other scenarios. The results in Table 2 are similar to those in Table 1; whether the operation is against Hizbullah or Hamas makes almost no difference to the responses. We found that the government enjoys 80 percent support in the scenario of keeping public approval, but that the support rates drop to 55 percent in the scenario of drastic decreasing approval.

Next, in an effort to strictly examine the effect of information, we carried out a statistical analysis of the responses using ordered logit. The results of ordered logit are shown in Table 3, under control of confounding factors because of our small sample size. We begin by tying pairs of the groups to identify each of the scenarios. Six tied pairs are present in Table 3 because the experiment applied the 2×3 design; two situations and three scenarios. Our main independent variable *support rate information*, defined as a dummy variable, is coded 1 for the first treatment group, with information on keeping approval rates, and 0 for any other group, if the tied pair of the scenarios is *still high–fall sharply* or *still high–no information*. This is displayed in columns 1, 2, 4, and 5 of Table 3. If the tied pair is *fall sharply–no information*, the support rate information



**Table 3.** The effect of poll information on Israeli attitudes toward the government in the 2×3 design.

	Hamas			Hizbullah		
	(1)High-Fall	(2)High-No Info	(3)Fall-No Info	(4)High-Fall	(5)High-No Info	(6)Fall-No Info
Support rate	0.886***	0.714**	-0.279	0.847***	0.852***	-0.112
information	(0.270)	(0.279)	(0.268)	(0.277)	(0.282)	(0.277)
Male	0.613**	1.230***	0.924***	0.584*	1.217***	0.768**
	(0.307)	(0.254)	(0.312)	(0.313)	(0.259)	(0.310)
Age	0.001	-0.006	0.008	0.005	0.003	0.012
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Academic	0.217	-0.044	0.184	-0.047	0.057	0.116
	(0.321)	(0.280)	(0.289)	(0.332)	(0.292)	(0.296)
Yeshiva	0.365	-0.499	-0.487	0.204	-0.488	-0.551
	(0.327)	(0.346)	(0.414)	(0.333)	(0.351)	(0.403)
Party ID Likud	0.248***	0.194***	0.280***	0.188***	0.142***	0.206***
	(0.046)	(0.045)	(0.051)	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.048)
Party ID Zionist	-0.168***	-0.161***	-0.198***	-0.160***	-0.169***	-0.154***
Union	(0.047)	(0.044)	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.044)	(0.045)
cut 1( $\kappa$ )	-0.486	-1.418**	-0.356	-0.926	-1.230**	-0.343
	(0.650)	(0.577)	(0.594)	(0.713)	(0.565)	(0.590)
cut 2( $\kappa$ )	0.694	-0.269	0.792	0.312	-0.220	0.691
	(0.626)	(0.626)	(0.578)	(0.675)	(0.610)	(0.572)
cut 3( $\kappa$ )	2.108***	1.274*	2.047***	1.805*	1.442**	1.967***
	(0.660)	(0.661)	(0.593)	(0.693)	(0.649)	(0.594)
Observations	317	328	306	310	326	300

variable is also coded 1 for the second treatment group, with information on falling public approval, and 0 for the 1 control group, with no information on a poll, as displayed in columns 3 and 6 of Table 3.

For our control variables, in order to respond to potential confounding factors, we include demographic variables—gender, age, and higher education. The gender factor may influence approval in waging war, because most male citizens in Israel are subject to compulsory military service. There seem to be perception gaps between generations because of different experiences in the army, especially on whether to serve in a war. The Israeli higher education system is quite unusual in religious terms, having both secular universities as well as yeshivas (higher education institutions for religious Jews). The distinction appears to account for approval or disapproval in an ongoing operation due to the right-wing leaning of most religious people.

Moreover, for ascertaining party identification we included a 10-point measure for the Likud and for the Zionist Union—the party alliance which was established in the run up to the 2015 legislative election by the Israeli Labor Party, Hatnuah, and the Green Movement. The variables of party identification represent respondents' ideology and can explain foreign policy positions. The Likud represents the largest rightist block and occupies a quarter of the current legislature; it is the main party of the current coalition government. The Zionist Union is a representative center-left block in Israel and the largest opposition in the current legislature. We expect that the viewpoint of the Likud produces tolerance for the human cost of war and preference for national security, whereas the outlook of the Zionist Union produces sensitivity to the cost of war.

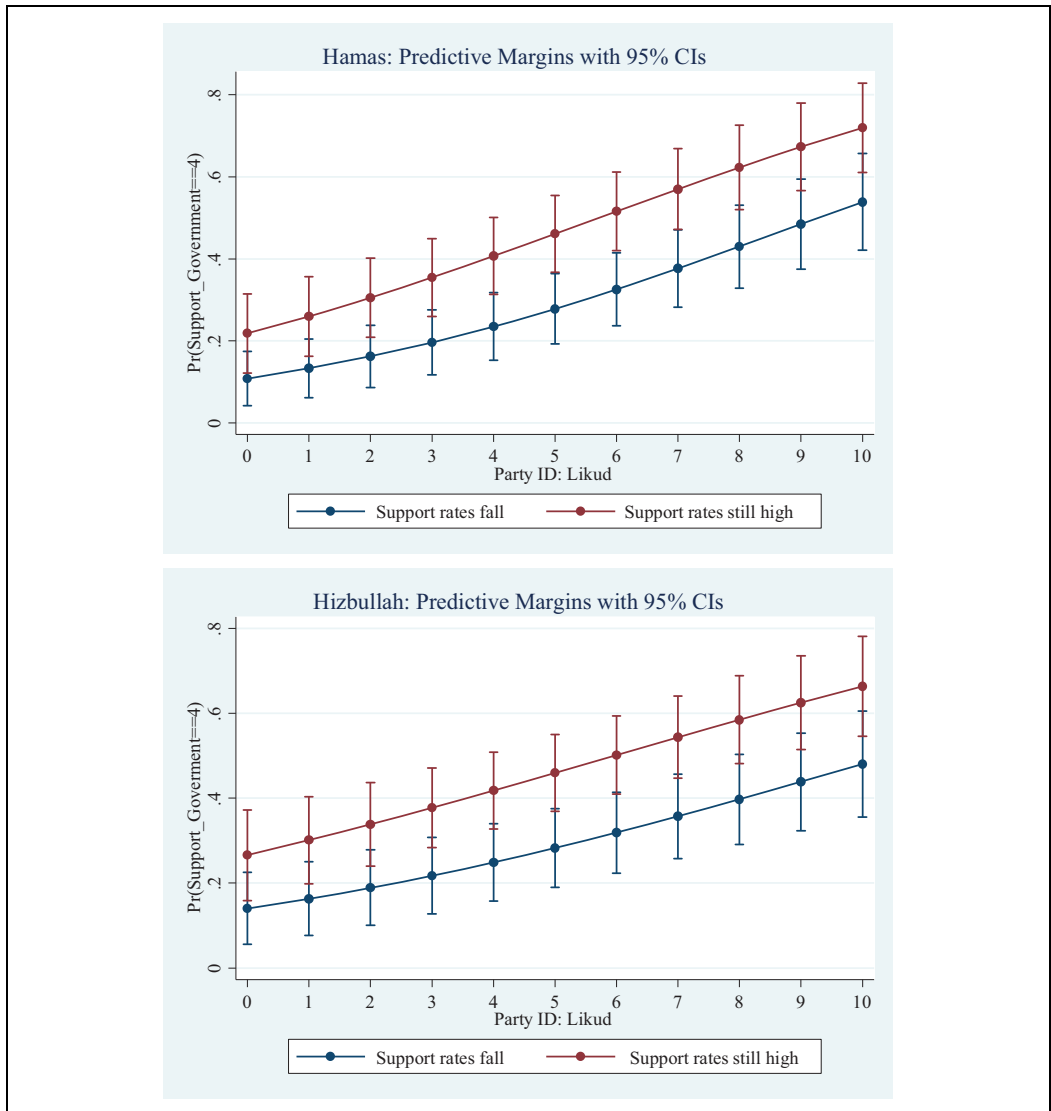


Figure 1. The estimations of strong support for the government.

It is important to note that information on maintaining approval rates, *support rate information*, is a positive significant predictor of support for the government using force against enemy organizations in spite of increasing casualties in the two weeks since the start of armed conflicts. The coefficient for *support rate information* in columns 3 and 6, the tied pair *fall sharply–no information*, is negative but not statistically significant. The results of the ordered logit agree with the apprehension of the levels of support in Tables 1 and 2. Thus, after accounting for demographic and ideological factors, the experimental condition of maintaining approval rates shapes public tolerance for the human cost of war on terror in Israel. The treatment of information on sharply

decreasing approval, however, has no effect on levels of support compared to the responses in the control group, *no information*. The coefficients of some control variables—gender and party identification—are statistically significant, and their signs indicate the expected directions.

Finally, we turn to Figure 1, which illustrates an intuitive understanding of how information shapes the public tolerance for casualties. The graphic in the top half of Figure 1 shows the predicted probabilities derived from our ordered logit of column 1 in Table 2—the ongoing military operation against Hamas. We can see that there is a 20-percentage-point increase in probability of strong support for the government waging war against Hamas from information on *fall sharply to still high* at the neutral position (= 5) in party identification with the Likud. The graphic in the bottom half displays the predictions derived from the model in column 4 of Table 2—the operation against Hizbullah. We identify an 18-percentage-point increase in probability of strong support for waging war against Hizbullah from *fall sharply to still high* at the neutral for the Likud party. Figure 1 illustrates that each of the rising curves—casualty tolerance—is dependent on varying party identification with the Likud. There are equal distances between the first treatment group, *still high*, and the second, *fall sharply*, among Israeli citizens preferring the Likud; party identification ranges from 6 to 10, “strongly like.” The graphics illustrate narrower distances between the two treatment groups among Likud opponents, ranging from 4 to 0, “strongly dislike.”

## Discussion

The duration of the rally effect is an exciting topic in the field of IR because the effect prompts a democratic government to continue a military operation. This study investigates the case of Israel to examine the experimental survey data, and obtains the results to support the hypothesis: Information on high government support rates has a positive effect on individuals’ support for the government. The respondents show continuous support significantly in both the tied pairs of *still high–fall sharply* and *still high–no information*. The result indicates that the bandwagon theory can explain the duration of the rally effect in Israel. Additional findings suggest: (1) no difference between the scenario of *fall sharply* and *no information*, and (2) no statistical difference of attitudes in the two situations—against Hamas in the Gaza Strip and against Hizbullah in Lebanon.

This research indicates that bandwagon theory, even though it is based on studies of American experiences, can explain the dynamics of Israeli public opinion in wartime. The Israeli people are subject to conscription as well as paying heavy taxes for the security of the small state. They therefore seem to be regarded as individual citizens having independent thinking about and their own opinions on politics. “Two Jews, three opinions” is a well-known phrase that illustrates the diversity of opinions in the disputatious society. It is also noted that “individualism . . . can coexist with patriotism, loyalty, and commitment to the state” (Sheffer, 1997: 138) in Israel after the Cold War era. However, the presence of the bandwagon effect suggests that emotional momentum—irrational responses to information of a majority support—would give the government opportunities to enforce a military operation despite increasing Israeli casualties.

The experimental survey sheds light on the mechanism that democratic states continue fighting wars on the strength of the rally duration effect. With no poll information or on getting information about the war being unpopular, people experienced casualty aversion—they became sensitive to death in the battlefield. In such a situation, *ceteris paribus*, the government would consider a ceasefire. The findings of our survey show that ordinary citizens frequently stand with the trusted government continuing a war effort to control for explicit confounding variables, political

ideologies, and demographic factors. They give approval not on the basis of rational calculation (Larson, 1996), but as an affective reaction. The results of polls often make people blind to the human cost—casualty sensitivity (Gelpi et al., 2009). This provides evidence in favor of the bounded rationality of the public in crisis situations.

Considering the additional finding of no statistical difference between the *fall sharply* and *no information* scenario, we can admit the former scenario as the baseline to support the government in wartime. It indicates that Israeli citizens are casualty adverse and sensitive to the human cost during a war. It makes sense that people may have a personal relationship with casualties, because Israel is a comparatively small country. The finding of the Israeli case, therefore, is different to the cost-benefit based model coming from US rally effect studies. The second additional finding, no difference between the scenario in fighting with Hamas and with Hizbullah, let us know that the two are seen as almost the same, merely as terrorist organizations. Perhaps most citizens have no interest in their purposes, strategies, or territories. They are just “our enemies” or targets for the IDF’s attack in the battlefield.

In addition, theoretically our study can improve the utilities of prospect theory. Bandwagon theory makes up for the deficiency in the prospect approach of how to determine the existence of the reference point in the context of international crises. The news media can provide the reference point for the mass public by showing the results of the polls on support for an ongoing war. On the framing process, the media can produce the specific context of the relationship between the citizens and the government in wartime. The context is, in our study, visualized in the polls: the Israeli government needs majority support to continue military operations. The findings of our study indicate that the Israelis continue supporting the government during the war when the majority support in polls is regarded as the reference point.

Finally, we must admit that some questions remain unanswered in this study. Among these, the most important question is whether there are any possible explanations for the bandwagon effect. We cannot identify the crucial theory to explain the mechanism producing affective attitudes to the high levels of approval for the government. To clarify the crucial theory, we have to go through trial and error in further studies. Future study could rethink the time span (we assumed two weeks in each scenario) and the wording of the questions, e.g. “God forbid” because of its informality, and “many casualties” because of its ambiguity.

Nonetheless, it is evident from our findings that we must confirm again any theoretical foundation to support the concept of public support on a rational calculation. Moreover, researchers could study the rally effect for another democratic state. Further research could find clear-cut evidence to confirm the bandwagon effect on the duration of the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon in the democracies of Europe or Asia, especially in a small democratic country.

## **Acknowledgements**

This article was originally presented at the 2016 meetings of the International Political Science Association held in Poznan. The author wishes to thank Raphael Ventura, Yuval Feinstein, Sigal Ben-Rafael Galanti, Ofer Feldman, Shir Hever, Yusuke Arai, Masahiro Iwasaki and anonymous reviewers for providing constructive comments on previous versions of the manuscript.

## **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: JSPS KAKENHI (Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research) 15H03308, and 16H03307.

## Notes

1. This corresponds to the statement by an Israeli political scientist in my interview conducted on November 22, 2015 at the Hebrew University.
2. Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro present important studies in support of rational expectations theory. They deny the random and volatile behavior of collective public opinion on foreign policy derived from the instability mood theory in Almond (1950), and indicate rather that public opinion shows coherent patterns. See Page and Shapiro (1992) and Shapiro and Page (1998).
3. Larson develops a simple formal model with three variables—the subjective estimate of operational success, the perceived benefits, and the anticipated costs—to provide a coherent explanation for the dynamics of support for military operation (Larson, 2000: 177).
4. Mueller (1973: 206) also refers to the bandwagon effect, but only in the context of voting behavior.

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